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New York

President:	Mr. Rycroft	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gimolieca
	Chad	Mr. Gombo
	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
	China	Mr. Xu Zhongsheng
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Jordan	Mrs. Kawar
	Lithuania	Ms. Šorytė
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Nigeria	Mr. Laro
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting. On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. Mladenov, who is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: At the outset, on behalf of the United Nations family in Jerusalem, I would like to extend my deepest condolences and sympathies to the families of the victims of the abhorrent terrorist attacks in Paris, Beirut and the Sinai. These tragic events serve to reinforce the reality that the extremism and terrorism that have infected many parts of the Middle East are no longer constrained by barriers. They can strike anywhere, anytime, and pose a grave threat to international peace and security. Against that backdrop, we cannot separate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from this global threat. Establishing a Palestinian State, while addressing Israel's substantial security concerns, would yield major dividends not only for Israelis and Palestinians alike, but for the entire region.

Over the past month, there were 36 reported attacks, including stabbings or attempted stabbings, shootings or car-rammings, by Palestinians against Israelis in Israel and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. They left at least 7 Israelis dead and 37 injured, including today's attack in Tel Aviv and just now in the settlement of Gush Etzion. The two apparent sniper attacks in Hebron on 7 November, which would be the first of their kind since the current escalation began, and the brutal drive-by shooting south of Hebron on 13 November, which killed a father and his son, are worrying signs of escalation from the use of knives to the use of firearms. Of the suspected Palestinian assailants, 24 have been killed.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, during the reporting period, in clashes across the West Bank and Gaza, 11 Palestinians were killed and over 3,500 injured, with 7 others injured in settler-related violence. I must once again reiterate the resolute condemnation of the United Nation of all terrorist attacks, and I call on political, community and religious leaders on all sides to speak out against terror and all forms of violence.

Since our last briefing (see S/PV.7521), the epicentre of violence has moved to Hebron, which, like Jerusalem, has holy sites revered by both Muslims and Jews and has been a cause of friction for decades. Hebron is the heart of the Palestinian economy. Its vitality is unmistakable and its vast potential for growth is broadly recognized. It is the West Bank's largest city with a population of some 170,000 people. It is also an industrial and commercial engine. Annual exports to Israel amount to over $240 million. The city's continued development is thus integral to the economic viability of a future Palestinian state.

I recently visited Hebron, and a walk through the old city evokes a starkly different image — streets barricaded and unnaturally cut off, houses emptied of life and activity, lives caged in by metal grids and turnstiles. Over the past 20 years, the city's Palestinian and Jewish populations have been physically separated. The economic impact of the violence raging in and around Hebron has been severe for the entire district. Once thriving markets are now eerily abandoned. Over the past decade, hundreds of shops located in the Israeli-controlled H2 area have been shut down either by military order or due to lack of business. I plan to return soon to Hebron with the United Nations country team to discuss with the Governor and the Mayor what programmes we can initiate to support the recovery of the area and promote community dialogue.

Ending the violence and de-escalating the overall situation in Jerusalem, Hebron and other areas must remain our immediate priority. But as the Secretary-General has consistently stated, this cannot be achieved through security measures alone. All parties must play a part in implementing measures that could have a positive impact. These include immediate efforts by all political, religious and community leaders to stop the hate-fuelled incitement that glorifies the murder of Jews or that brands all Palestinians as terrorists. Recent understandings on upholding the status quo at Haram-

Al Sharif/Temple Mount must also be implemented. It is necessary to address the apparent impunity for settler violence against Palestinians. The sanctity of burial rituals must be recognized, and Palestinians should be allowed to bury their deceased without unnecessary delay. In Hebron, restrictions should be eased and the main commercial artery should be reopened, in accordance with the 1994 protocols. Steps to bolster security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority must be strengthened in order to prevent any further deterioration of the situation. Finally, the use of firearms by Israeli security forces should be employed only when less extreme means are insufficient to address an imminent threat of death or serious injury.

It is critical to also deal with the threats that kill the prospect of a two-State solution. The reality in which a settler State is emerging in the occupied West Bank must be reversed if hope is to be reignited. I am concerned by the decision announced on 18 November to issue tenders for 436 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Ramat Shlomo — the first such tender announcement in over a year. Equally worrisome are the five punitive demolitions of the family houses of alleged perpetrators of terrorist acts, carried out by Israel over the past week. I reiterate that settlement activity and punitive demolitions are illegal under international law. They also deepen mistrust between the parties and further aggravate an already highly tense environment.

In a troubling development, Israeli forces have carried out several raids on hospitals, including at Al-Makassed hospital in East Jerusalem and at Al-Ahli hospital in Hebron. My Deputy and United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory has called on the authorities to respect health-care facilities and the right of all individuals to receive health care.

During the reporting period, the security situation in Gaza was relatively calm compared to the West Bank, despite three fatalities as a result of clashes near the border fence. That having been said, however, seven rockets were fired toward Israel, three of which impacted Israeli territory, without causing fatalities. Palestinian militants also test fired 14 rockets at the sea. The Israel Defense Forces responded with six air strikes and three limited incursions into the Gaza Strip. On at least four occasions, Israeli forces opened fire at Palestinians at sea, resulting in injuries to at least two persons. In a worrying development, Israel intercepted the attempted illegal transfer of 450 litres of toluene diisocyanate, a hazardous substance that can be used for the production of a large quantity of rockets.

I call on all factions on the ground in Gaza not to engage in activities that risk destabilizing the situation and undermining the reconstruction process, particularly as the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism continues to function effectively. In October, a new stream was introduced to simplify access to construction materials to finish housing units that had been started but not completed prior to last year's conflict. Under this stream, over 6,000 applicants have so far been introduced into the system. In a welcome development, in mid-October Israel removed aggregate from the list of dual-use materials. The good news, however, has been tempered by the addition of other items, including timber, to the list this year. These additions hinder Gaza's reconstruction, and I call on the Israeli authorities to reconsider their decisions.

Based on developments on the ground, the current conditions make a return to negotiations a challenging prospect. Trust must be rebuilt and, to that end, bold and significant steps on the ground must be taken in order to tangibly improve lives and irreversibly move towards the end of the occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian State. In the period before an eventual return to negotiations, the parties and their international partners must pursue measures that strengthen their institutions, economic prospects and security. This will require substantial policy changes on the ground by Israel.

The Middle East Quartet remains the principal international entity to support and encourage negotiations towards a comprehensive and just resolution of the conflict. The Quartet envoys plan to travel to the region in the coming period to engage directly with the parties. Meanwhile, we continue to look to the Security Council for any additional guidance on developing a new peace architecture for resolving the conflict.

Turning to the wider region, the Council was briefed yesterday on developments in Lebanon, including in Beirut. I will therefore not add anything on that issue.

Let me say, however, that the Syrian conflict for its part continues to take a devastating toll on the Syrian people and beyond, and poses an ever graver threat to international peace and security. For all of these reasons, the Secretary-General is greatly encouraged

that in Vienna the international community has finallyre-engaged in searching for a political settlement to the Syrian conflict based on the transition elements of the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). It is important that key international and regional players follow through on their commitments by actively insisting that their Syrian allies engage constructively in all of these areas. This is vital in order to give political backing, leverage and credibility to our efforts.

Turning to the Golan, the situation remains volatile, with clashes between Syrian Government forces and armed groups, shelling and occasional air strikes continuing in the areas of separation and limitation, in particular in Ufaniyah, Jabbata al-Khashab and Al-Baath in the central part of the area of separation. In the context of these clashes, fire from the Bravo side has impacted across the ceasefire line. On 13 October, the Israel Defence Forces notified the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) that they had retaliated to spill-over fire from the Bravo side by firing three missiles at Syrian armed forces positions in the area of limitation. UNDOF did not observe the alleged firing from the Bravo side. These events have the potential to escalate tensions between Israel and Syria, jeopardizing the ceasefire between the two countries. In these challenging circumstances, however, UNDOF continues to use its best efforts to carry out its mandate.

In closing, let me say that I refuse to be convinced that Israelis and Palestinians want to live by the sword and in a state of perpetual violence. We owe it to the people of that troubled land who, despite endless setbacks and disappointments, have continued to maintain hope that negotiated peace can be realized. I can assure members of the Council that the Secretary-General remains steadfast in his support of any effort to restore the hope that a two-State solution can be achieved through negotiations. But the long road ahead will require leadership — leadership that has been glaringly absent to date.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.